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www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/kuipers/

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Grand Haven resident testifies on Sen. Kuipers' pier-safety legislation

LANSING — At the invitation of Sen. Wayne Kuipers, Grand Haven resident Vicki Cech testified before a Senate panel about the importance of strengthening pier-safety laws.

Cech told lawmakers about how her son, 17-year-old Andy Fox, died in 2003 after being swept away in a rip current at the Grand Haven pier. She pressed for legislation that would crack down on people who steal life preservers from the piers and beaches. Cech said 22 life preservers were stolen locally in 2005.

"I can't let anyone go through this nightmare if I can help it," Cech told senators.

Besides pushing for tougher laws, Cech and other members of the Great Lakes Beach and Pier Safety Task Force have created informational material to educate people how to use piers safely and about the dangers of rip currents. The group's Web site is located at www.respectthepower.org.

"We have to make sure our coastlines and piers remain safe," said Kuipers, R-Holland. "Being able to warn people about tough penalties for stealing life preservers would help reduce the number stolen and vandalized each year. People have to know stealing life preservers isn't a prank. It's something that jeopardizes the lives of others."

Kuipers' legislation would make it a misdemeanor for anyone who tampers with or steals a marine-safety device maintained by the state or a local government. If a person dies or becomes permanently disabled because the device was unavailable or unusable, the offender can be found guilty of a felony.

Related resolutions urge the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to increase public awareness and notification of rip currents in the Great Lakes and call on the Michigan Department of Education to teach pupils about the dangers of rip currents and learn basic pier safety.

Kuipers unveiled his legislation last October in Grand Haven.

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Note: A photo of Sen. Kuipers and Vicki Cech testifying is available on the senator's photowire Web page, www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Kuipers/Kuipers.htm.